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Alabama PSC looks for job creation incentives

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MONTGOMERY — The state Public Service Commission is working with Alabama Power Co. to design incentives for small businesses to expand and add employees, Commissioner Terry Dunn said Monday.

Dunn said the state's utility regulatory board and the largest utility it regulates are talking about ways to offer discounts to small- and medium-size businesses that hire new employees or expand into vacant commercial property. The commission is also looking at expanding the number of firms that can qualify for Alabama Power's small business rates, he said.

Alabama Power spokesman Michael Sznajderman confirmed the discussions are under way with the commission, but nothing is definite yet.

"You might say it's an economic stimulus package for business," the spokesman said.

Dunn said anything that is worked out will have to be approved by the full three-member commission, and his goal is to have a plan in place by summer, when electricity use is usually highest. Dunn said it would enhance work by the governor and Legislature to create jobs and lower Alabama's 9.1 percent unemployment rate.

If the Alabama Power talks are successful, the commissioner said the PSC would have similar discussions with Alabama Gas Corp. and Mobile Gas Service Corp., two major suppliers of natural gas.